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SUBJECT: UKRAINE: PRE-ELECTION SNAPSHOT: LVIV AT SECOND
GLANCE

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11. (SBU) Summary: A return visit to the western city of Lviv March 17-18 indicated that campaigning in city and surrounding areas has moved into a higher gear the final week before the March 26 parliamentary and local elections, as politicians scramble to maintain their base and win over the dwindling undecided voters. Lviv's streets and airwaves were even more crowded with banners, flyers, streamers, pop-up tents, posters and political ads than in late February (reftel). Yulia Tymoshenko barnstormed through Lviv and three towns south of Lviv March 17 amid reports her eponymous bloc (BYuT) is gaining on President Yushchenko's Our Ukraine; she reportedly plans a return visit March 24. Rada speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn visited Lviv March 15 but seems in danger of not making it over the 3-percent threshold despite a well-funded campaign. Meanwhile, campaigning for local races, including for mayor of Lviv, remained mired in mudslinging and acrimony. End summary.

The Rada Race: Orange and White, but sterile?

12. (SBU) Several observers of the Lviv scene told us they expected Our Ukraine and BYuT to win a majority of the Lviv oblast vote March 26, but that Our Ukraine's earlier 2-to-1 commanding lead over BYuT had slipped (reftel). Anatoli Romanyuk, director of the Center for Political Studies, and Andriy Pavlyshyn, editor of the Our Ukraine-friendly daily Lvivska Hazeta, both estimated that Our Ukraine would capture 40% of the vote (down from 45%) while BYuT's share could rise to as much as 23% (up from 18%). Lviv Committee of Voters of Ukraine (CVU) head Roman Koshovy predicted a 40-to-20% vote split between Our Ukraine and BYuT locally. Pavlyshyn, who anchors a live, weekly political talk show on local TV, predicted that Tymoshenko's BYuT would surge on election day to beat Our Ukraine nationwide, capturing up to 23% of the total vote, a view shared by other Lviv observers and pundits who admire Tymoshenko's oratory skills.

13. (SBU) Tymoshenko visited the Lviv region March 17 in full campaign mode. Media and eyewitness reports about the crowds she attracted differed markedly. For example, the pro-BYuT daily Vysoki Zamok said in a page one teaser headline illustrated with a picture of Tymoshenko that she met with "nearly 200,000 people" in three of the regions largest cities: 30,000 in Striy, and 40,000 each in Drohobych and Sambir. There was no account, however, of where she met with the other 90,000. (Note: Vysoky Zamok, which is the leading paper in the Lviv region, is owned by Stepan Kurpil, No. 36 on the BYuT ticket.) In contrast, the UNIAN wire service reported a crowd of 10,000 in Drohobych, and an OSCE LTO who attended the Tymoshenko Drohobych rally told us he observed a lackluster crowd of about 5,000. Said one observer with a wry smile: "It appears Mr. Kurpil may have added an extra zero to the numbers."

14. (SBU) Next in line to capture the local vote are the PORa-Party of Reforms and Order (PRP) with 5-7% and the Socialists with 5%. According to Romanyuk, Rada Speaker's Volodymyr Lytvyn's bloc will likely poll less than three percent in Lviv Oblast despite a concerted campaign effort that included a one-day visit March 15. Romanyuk said Lytvyn started campaigning early and heavily in Lviv, and at one point was polling at about 7-8%. However, due to an unwise use of campaign funds, lackluster ads and a campaign run largely by old-style "hacks," Lytvyn's bloc had slipped, Romanyuk said. Romanyuk complained about a "lifeless and formulaic" campaign in which political forces engaged more in marketing than voter education and civil society building. Still, while the campaign might not be an ideal example of democracy in action, this time around it was "free--free from fear," he said.

Colorful Spring, even before the thaw

15. (SBU) There were clear signs during our visit of stepped-up campaigning wherever people gathered, walked and shopped. In the Lviv city center, in the square running the length of Freedom Avenue (Prospekt Svobody) and around Ivan Franko University, dozens of pop-up campaign tents representing a cross-section of political parties dotted the

streets. The center of Lviv and roads leading south to Stryi and Drohobych were festooned with tens of thousands of ribbons: Our Ukraine's orange and BYuT's white emblazoned with a red heart. When asked what the joining of the two colors symbolized, some passersby opined it was a signal from voters that Yushchenko and Tymoshenko should re-unite, though others suspected one-upsmanship. Many Lvivites thought prospects for a reunion were not high, while expressing voter regret and disenchantment that the two key leaders of the Orange Revolution remained split.

Local/Mayoral Race getting dirty

16. (SBU) According to Lviv CVU head Koshovy, the main change in the past three weeks had been a "criminalization of the campaign process" at the local level. Koshovy said he had received reports about seven incidents involving campaign workers for local elections, including two fires at campaign offices, a beating, fist fights and one detention involving a Green Party worker who had been harassed and let go. Clive Jordan (please protect), the OSCE/ODIHR long-term observer (LTO) for Lviv city and northern parts of the oblast, said he had not heard of these specific incidents, but did not discount them, since some of the people hired to plaster campaign posters around the city were down-on-their-luck types who often did a poor job and were out to make quick money.

17. (SBU) Regarding Lviv's mayoral race, in which the two primary candidates came from competing factions of Our Ukraine (Anatoly Sadovoi slightly ahead of Vasyl Kuybida), Jordan said that the reported violence may be more related to competing business interests. "There's a whole lot of money at stake for the mayor's job," he said, pointing to stories that third-place mayoral candidate Petro Pysarchuk controlled a number of city markets. (Note: Jordan was guarded in talking at length about local elections because the OSCE mandate is to only observe the parliamentary election.) Thus, the battle for local office centered on who would get what space and business licenses, he said

Election Administration

18. (SBU) ODIHR's LTO for southern Lviv oblast, Yale Trainer, said his recent visits to some 25 polling stations showed an overall improvement in voter lists, organization and staffing, in comparison to several weeks ago, adding that the increase in salaries from 17 to 50 hryvnias per day for poll workers was a welcome added boost. Because of the predominance of Ukrainian in Lviv and the surrounding region, Yale said there were fewer problems with double entry of names and virtually no Russian-Ukrainian transliteration problems.

19. (SBU) In contrast, both Romanyuk and Pavlyshyn said they expected "chaos" on voting day because of the nearly meter-long ballot for the Rada, combined with other ballots for mayors, village councils, and raion and oblast councils. The multiple ballots were likely to confuse and frustrate voters. "Who knows how the ballots will be filled out?" one local official running for a raion council asked rhetorically.

"Checkbook journalism" alive and well?

10. (SBU) With regard to press freedom, journalist Pavlyshyn claimed that what existed now was a false sense of freedom of the press. "Journalists are doing the same thing as before (writing kompromat, mudslinging, etc.), only getting paid for it," he commented. Pavlyshyn noted that his newspaper was one of the few that publicized its code of ethics on its website and explained its policy of how to recognize which articles were paid-for "points of view" or public relations pieces. (See www.gazeta.lviv.ua.) Comment: In other words, "check-book journalism" has not disappeared from Ukraine's media.

11. (U) Visit Embassy Kiev's classified website at: www.state.gov/p/eur/kiev.
Herbst